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ABSTRACT

The extent, nature, and sources of alienation among students and teachers in high school are being examined at two inner city comprehensive high schools in each of five large urban districts. Research methods include interviews with staff (over 300 individuals) and collection of statistical data. A conceptual framework for studying these issues is presented and the data collection procedures are discussed. Three types of teacher commitment and two types of student commitment have been found. Interrelationships between teacher commitment and student commitment have been uncovered. Correlates and results of this ongoing study are presented in figures, charts, and tables. Emerging themes in student and teacher commitment are listed. General preliminary findings suggest the following: (1) the district context influences student and teacher commitment; (2) there is an interplay between student and teacher commitment; and (3) a variety of school factors influence the interaction between teachers and students. (VM)

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ALIENATION AND COMMITMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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ALIENATION AND COMMITMENT
OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

The objective of this presentation is to examine the extent, nature, and sources of alienation and commitment among students and teachers in high schools in five large urban districts. The presentation is based on a study in progress, a study which was designed to respond to a request from the superintendents of the five large cities forming the Mid-Atlantic Metropolitan Council--Baltimore, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Washington--to help them improve the quality of secondary education in their districts. This study is a first step in that process. Its focus on alienation and commitment reflects the concerns raised by the school superintendents and by staff in meetings with Research for Better Schools. A secondary purpose is to contribute to the not-yet-well-developed general understanding of alienation and commitment in education. Because the phenomenon is not well understood in education, the study is intended to be exploratory. To describe the study's design, this section first provides a conceptual framework. It then describes procedures for data collection, for data analysis, and for the use of study findings.

Perspective and Framework

The idea that commitment to an occupation leads to greater interest in staying in the field and greater effort to achieve occupational ends has not been explored extensively in education, although there is evidence for the relationship between commitment and performance in other fields (Angle & Perry, 1981; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). As for students, alienation has been found to relate to the poorest of student performances, that is, dropping out of school (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Defining alienation and commitment has held a continuing fascination for students of organizations and occupations (Kanter, 1968; Seeman, 1975). Johnson (1973) and Mowday et al. (1982) cite numerous definitions of alienation and of commitment, respectively. The common theme in these definitions is the presence or absence of a psychological bond or identification of the individual with the larger system--a bond which, if it exists, takes on special meaning and importance to the individual (Firestone, 1985). In our view, alienation and commitment are the extremes of a dimension that could be labeled in a number of ways (e.g., attachment, psychological identification). For the sake of simplicity, we refer to it as the alienation/commitment dimension. The label, though, is not as important as the dimension's components.

Our expectation is that the level of staff and student alienation and commitment in a school depend in important ways on a variety of school and district conditions that are under control of district policy makers and school and district administrators. These factors are not yet well specified because of the discontinuity between research on the organizational characteristics of schools and the social psychological literature on alienation. For this study, we identified the characteristics of schools in four categories: physical arrangements, formal systems, administrative actions, and teacher or student beliefs. The latter incorporates the school psychological dimensions.

The conceptual framework in Chart 1 brings together the organizational and social psychological literature and provides guidance for this study. It is not viewed so much as a model to be formally tested but as a heruistic device to guide exploration and analysis. Three points should be made about this model:

1. It illustrates that the district context has an influence on student and teacher commitment through its influence on the schools;

2. It suggests that there is an interplay between student and teacher commitment;

3. It indicates a variety of school factors that influence the interaction between teacher and students.

Data Collection

Data were collected from two comprehensive high schools in each of the five cities. Each district was asked to provide two inner city, comprehensive high schools to participate in the study. Data were also collected on the administration of high schools throughout each of the five cities.

Within each city, interviews were conducted with a variety of district staff, typically including the superintendent, the deputy superintendent, and individuals responsible for curriculum, research and evaluation, staff development, and teacher and student personnel. In addition, basic statistical information on the staffing of the school and its performance were collected. Within each building, interviews were conducted with the principal, two assistant principals, a counselor, teachers and department heads from a variety of departments, and ninth or tenth graders and seniors who are both high and low achieving students. In all over 300 individuals in ten high schools and five district offices were interviewed.

Interviews were open-ended but designed to obtain information on major categories in the conceptual framework--district factors, school factors, power-success-purpose-acceptance, and the different dimension of commitment. The specific questions varied with the respondents' position--e.g., the superintendent was asked about district factors, and students were asked questions to elicit their commitment. Interviewers were given leeway to adjust the questions to local conditions, but all major categories were covered in each school and district.

Data Analysis and Procedures

A comparative qualitative approach to data analysis has been employed. Modeled on the ideas of Miles and Huberman (1984), Patton (1980), and Taylor and Bogdan (1984), the following steps were taken:

1. All staff who visited sites came together in a group session to review and revise basic concepts in light of the field work.

2. A series of analytic memos identifying and clarifying key issues were written. Through this process, major conceptual categories were redefined in light of the field experience.

3. Site visitors rated each school a dimensions of teacher and student commitment and a range of district factors.

4. Ratings were checked against field notes to verify their reliability and accuracy.

5. Cross-tabulations were conducted to examine relationships among rated variables.

6. Field notes were reviewed to find examples of processes at work affecting alienation and commitment within each school. These reviews also helped to identify practices that effectively promote staff and student commitment.

7. Return visits were made to each district to provide feedback on observations at each site. These visits were used to validate initial conclusions about specific schools and districts and provide opportunities to obtain additional information.

8. Steps 1-6 were used to brainstorm recommendations about new school and district policies that will be useful to promote staff and student commitment.

9. The principals of the ten high schools were brought to Philadelphia to review findings and recommendations and generate additional recommendations.

10. Superintendents of the five districts will review the findings and generate additional recommendations.

Findings

Based on both theory and initial investigations in the field, we have defined commitment of teachers and students as multi-dimensional concepts. Commitment is not a monolith; instead one must specify "commitment to what".

We identify three types of teacher commitment: commitment to teaching (focussing on the content area and/or the instructional process), commitment to students, and commitment to place--the school itself. One can be committed to one, two, or all three. Similarly with students, there is commitment to place (coming to the school), and/or commitment to learning. We assume that the various types of student or teacher commitment are interrelated and that they influence each other. This interrelationship is displayed in figure 2.

The remainder of this paper on a study in progress is a series of charts, tables, and figures representing the framework, analysis, findings and emerging themes. These include:

- Figure 3: Scattergram of Teacher Commitment to Student by Teacher Commitment to Teaching
- Figure 4: Scattergram of Student Commitment to Place by Student Commitment to Learning
- Chart 1: Teacher Commitment Variables: Definitions and Examples
- Chart 2: Student Commitment Variables: Definitions and Examples
- Figure 2: The Interplay of Teacher and Student Commitment
- Chart 3: Intervening Variables: Definitions and Examples
- Chart 4: "Relevance" Variables Affecting Student Commitment: Definitions and Examples
- Chart 5: "Respect" Variables Affecting Student Commitment
- Table 1: Kendall's Tau of Factors Contributing to Student Commitment
- Emerging Themes Regarding Student Commitment
- Chart 6: School Variables that Influence Teacher Commitment: Physical Arrangements and Formal Systems: Definitions and Examples

- Chart 7: School Variables that Influence Teacher Commitment: Administrative Actions. Definitions and Examples
- Chart 8: School Variables that Influence Teacher Commitment: Teacher Beliefs
- Table 2: Kendall's Tau of Teacher Commitment Variables with Physical Arrangements and Formal Systems
- Table 3: Kendall's Tau of Teacher Commitment Variables with Administrative Actions
- Table 4: Kendall's Tau of Teacher Commitment Variables with Teacher Beliefs
- Factors Associated with Overall Teacher Commitment by Strength of Kendall's Tau
- Factors Associated with Three Types of Teacher Commitment
- Emerging Themes: Sources of Teacher Commitment
- Emerging Themes: Barriers to Effectiveness and Teacher Commitment Commitment
- Emerging Themes: Towards Creative Problem Solving

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FIGURE 1
MODEL OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN SCHOOL CONTEXT AND COMMITMENT

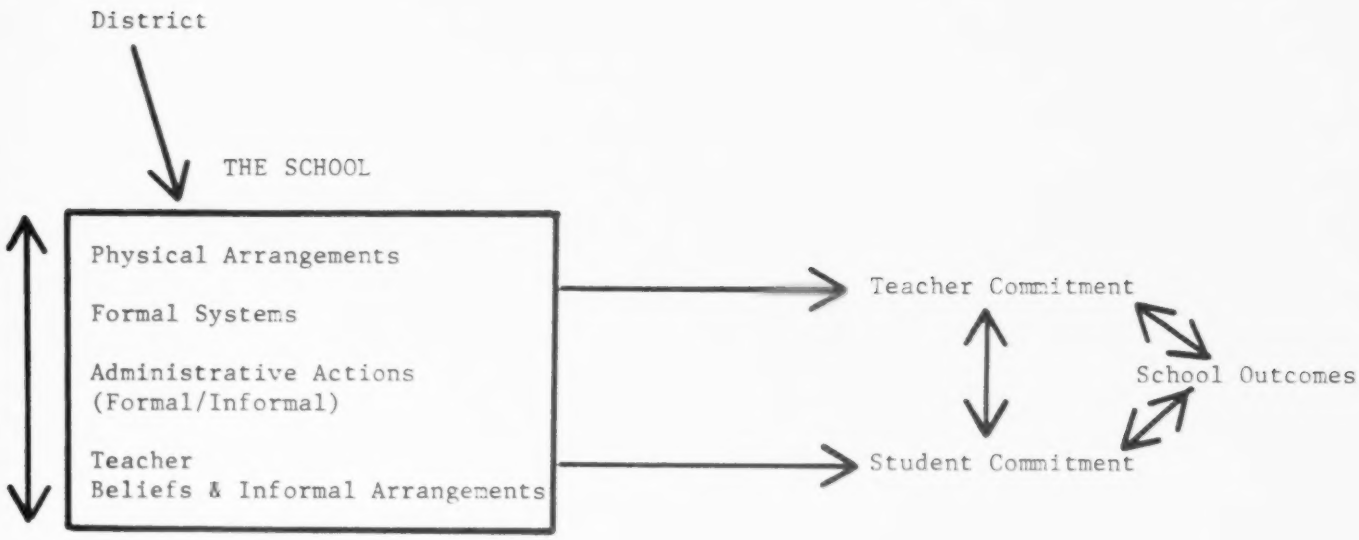


CHART 1
TEACHER COMMITMENT VARIABLES

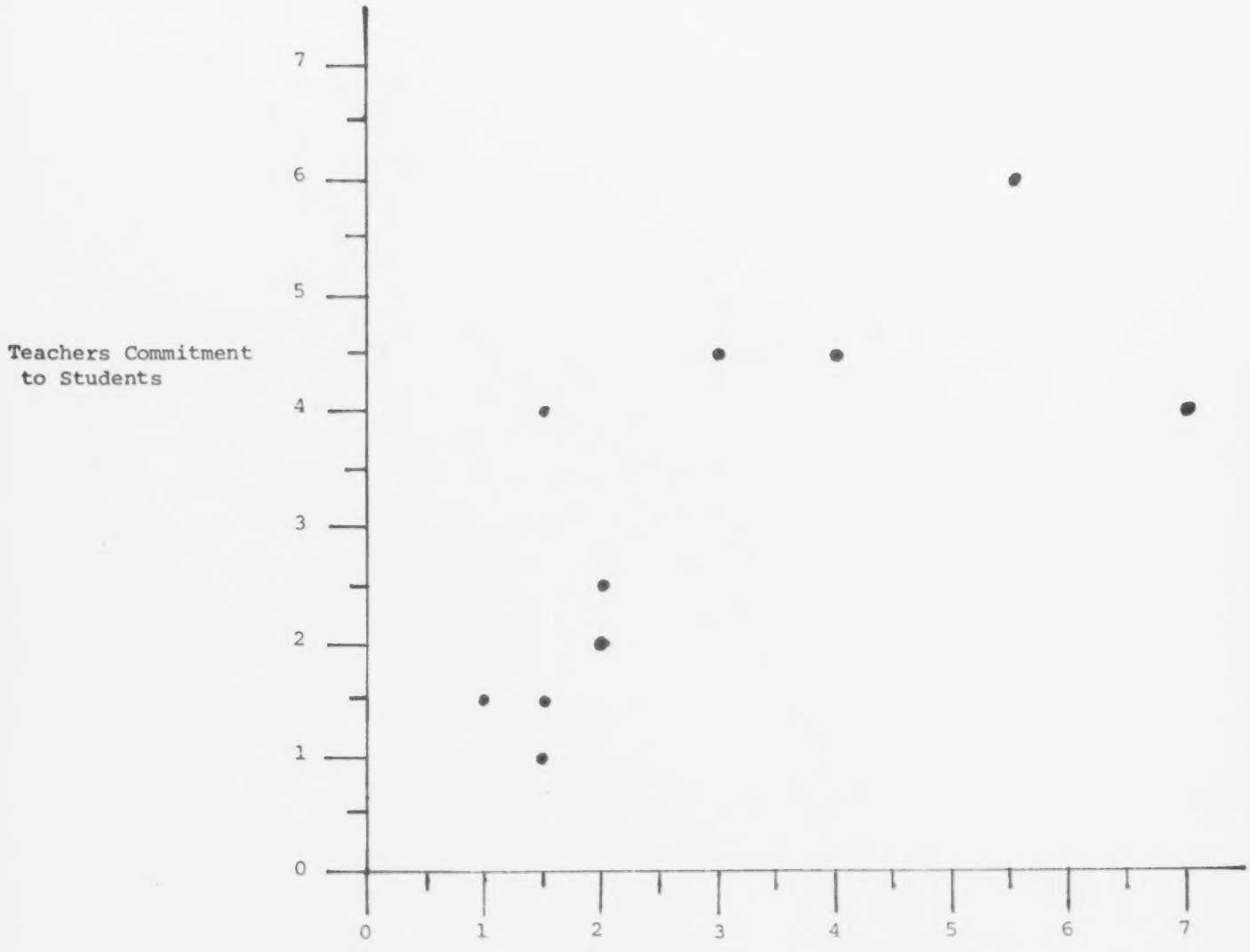
Variable	Definition	Example
Commitment to Students	Strong positive attachment to students and the idea of helping them	HIGH "I love the children, and I know they need help. Just knowing that I did some little thing for a few students." "I stay because of these students. I've come across students fighting after school hours. They don't address me, but I get respect." LOW "You work harder here because of the clientele. After eighteen years, I've put my time in."
Commitment to Teaching	Strong positive attachment to the content craft and outcomes of instruction.	HIGH "The degree of professionalism here is exceptional. At the school I worked at before, the main topic of discussion was retirement. Here people talk about educational issues, what works. Its intellectually stimulating." "[A good day] is when the students learn. There's a good discussion, a challenging discussion. When you test and everyone does well."
Commitment to Place	Strong positive attachment to the specific school	HIGH "I was a temp. here for my first two years. I was offered a permanent slot at [another school], but I stayed here as a temp. instead...I'm ready to try something different, but I want to do it here. I'd like to get into counseling." LOW: MODERATE "Going someplace else doesn't make the grass greener. There are problems everywhere."

CHART 2
STUDENT COMMITMENT VARIABLES

Variable	Definition	Example
Commitment to Learning	A strong belief in the importance of doing well in courses	HIGH "I have a good day when I answer a hard question in class." "In [a special program], you can work independently and help plan your courses. You can suggest projects and topics to work on." LOW "I tolerate teachers. I use "passive resistance" and sleep through class." "A good day is when there's no homework."
Commitment to Place	A strong positive attachment to the specific school.	HIGH Students tell each other about the Woodson Way "A good day is when I'm with my friends." LOW Students don't even come to the basketball games during the regular season when we're winning.

Figure 3

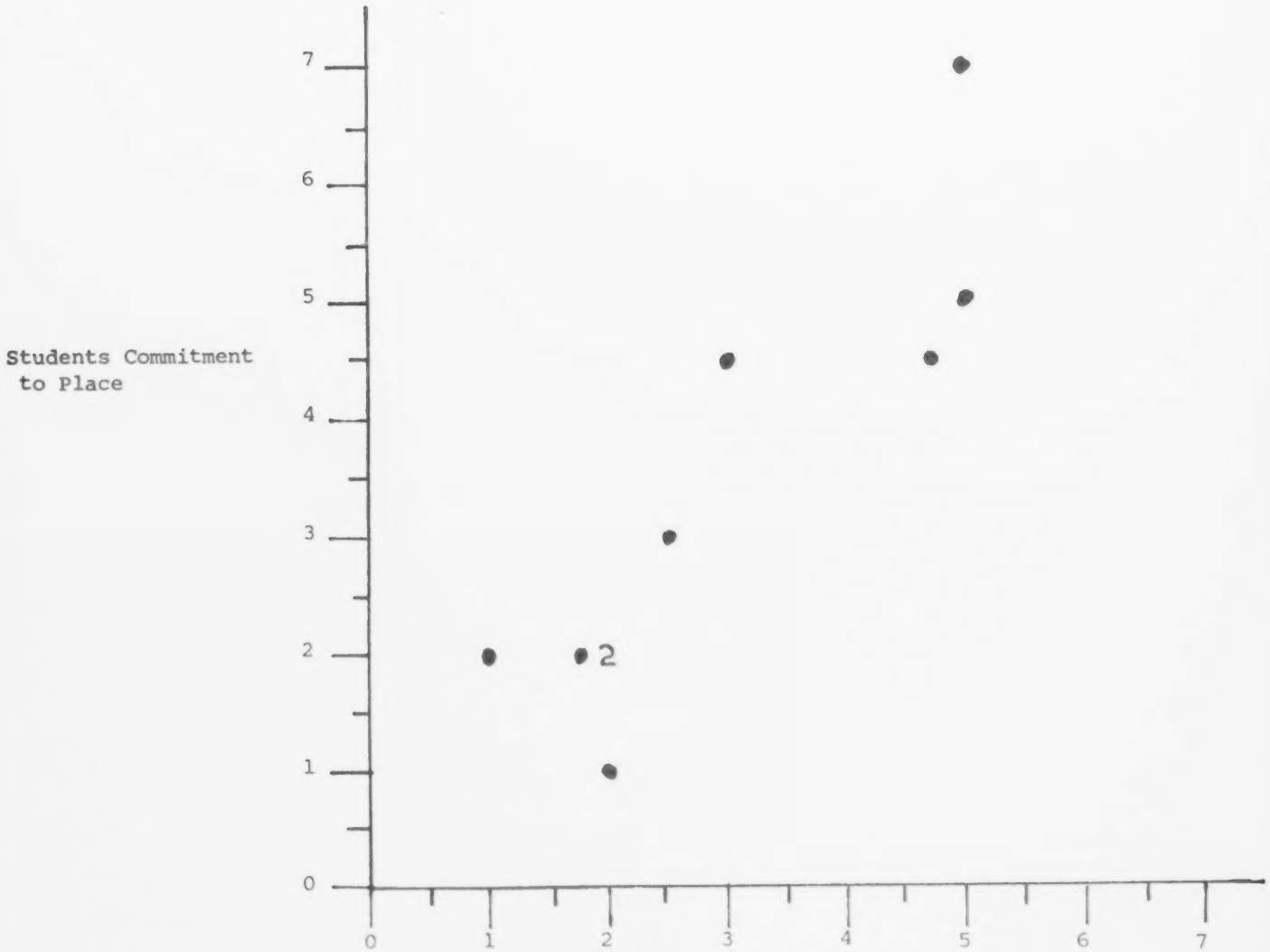
SCATTERGRAM OF TEACHERS COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS BY TEACHERS COMMITMENT TO TEACHING



KENDELL'S TAU = .63

Figure 4

SCATTERGRAM OF STUDENTS COMMITMENT TO PLACE BY
STUDENTS COMMITMENT TO LEARNING



KENDELL'S TAU = .79

CHART 3
INTERVENING VARIABLES

Variable	Definition	Example
Teacher Blaming		
Blaming the Students	Displacement of responsibility for one's own action to students. Complaints about student background and behavior that is disproportionate to the situation.	"Because of the open enrollment policy, the better students in the area don't come here. Yet, this school is expected to be like the others. [Schools X and Y] get the better black students. We have to work harder to get the scores up. We get more aggravation and less results." "They don't care. More black student drop out. They have no family, no foundation. They can go out on the corner and pop a pill....The white students act the same way. They have no incentives. I called one Mother about her child not coming to school. She said, he doesn't like school."
Blaming the System	Displacement of responsibility for one's own action to the administration.	"They load us down with paper work and don't handle students the way they need to 'cause they're in a never-never land....Students who cause repeated problems in class are still around....The problem is stupid policies from [the district office] and the federal courts. I'd like to see a judge teach a class where you can't throw a kid out 'cause of his constitutional rights." "I don't dwell on discipline as much as I need to. The administration doesn't support us on discipline. They say do it, but they tie your hands....The tone has to be set at the top. People are socializing when they should be working. I mean administrators."
Student Actions		
Student Behavior	Extent to which norms of good behavior (dress, decorum, neatness, politeness, order) are internalized and acted on.	HIGH Politeness in halls. Noise level is reasonable. Students get to class on time.

Figure 2
THE INTERPLAY OF STUDENT AND TEACHER COMMITMENT

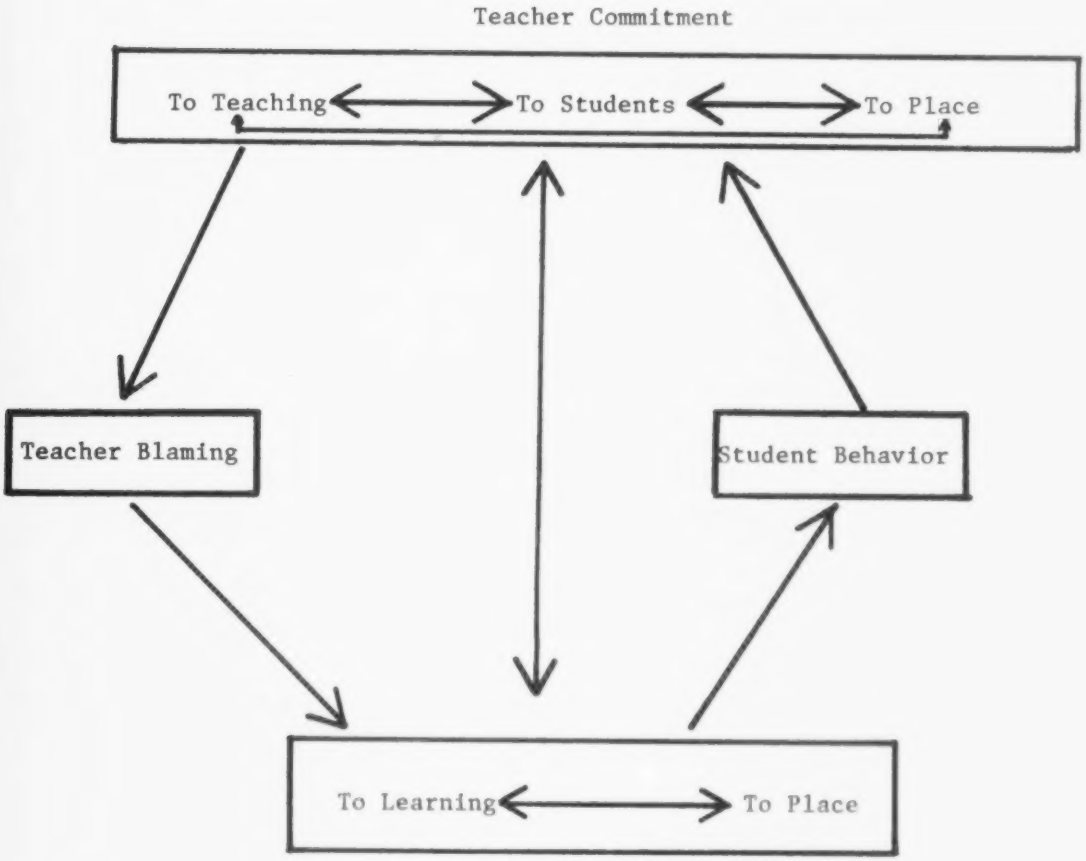


CHART 4
RELEVANCE VARIABLES AFFECTING STUDENT COMMITMENT

Variable	Definition	Example
Programming for Relevance	The presence and extent of job relevant programs and career oriented counseling	HIGH A counselor showed the large number of students she had placed in different branches of the armed services. A school has an electrical academy, a business magnet, weekly speakers on different careers and a career fair.
Students Sense of Relevance	Strength with which students see the connection between school work and a job.	HIGH "I'm in the dental technician program....It's pretty relevant. We make dentures and partials. We don't scrape. It's a two-year program, and we get a certificate at the end....I tell my friends to get in it. They like the pay. Its pretty decent. There's a place in _____ that will start you out at ten dollars an hour." "I want to go into construction. School helped when I took construction." "A high school diploma keeps students in school so they can get a good job, like being a tractor trailer driver."

CHART 5
RESPECT VARIABLES AFFECTING STUDENT COMMITMENT*

Variable	Definition	Example
Administrative Support for Students	An understanding of and willingness to help students attain their interests as exhibited by administrators.	LOW "Mr. X doesn't go into the classroom. He doesn't listen to both sides of the story." "Some principals ignore you while you're talking." HIGH "Students respect principals who force people to do what's right and who cares about students' future." "Mr. Y is the best...He listens to you, He'll talk to you, and he lets you explain."
Students' Sense of Adult Respect	Students' own belief that they are treated with decency and fair.	HIGH "[A good thing about this school] is that the teachers care. At [another school] they put an example on the board once. Here they will explain to you."

* Variables introduced during discussion of teacher commitment are not presented.

Table 1
KENDALLS TAU OF FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STUDENT COMMITMENT

		Overall Commitment	Commitment to Learning	Commitment to Place
Relevance				
Programming for Relevance	(FS)	.60	.68	.53
Students' Future Plans	(SB)	.76	.83	.73
Respect				
Consistency	(AA)	.71	.61	.66
Administrative support for Students	(AA)	.61	.50	.77
Bureaucratic Orientation	(AA)	-.54	-.56	-.58
Instructional Press	(AA)	.84	.88	.89
Students' Sense that They are Respected by Adults	(SB)	.70	.80	.66

EMERGING THEMES

STUDENT COMMITMENT

PEERS

Friendships bring students to school, but few activities to build on.

CAREER RELEVANCE

Programs where students see a direct connection between school and future jobs motivate students.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Students need and respond to a press for excellence linked to academics.

RESPECT

Students do not want to be in a place where they feel insulted and treated unfairly.

TOUGH LOVE

Students want and need their schools to be orderly places.

Students want and need to know the adults in the school care about them as individuals.

CHART 6
VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE TEACHER COMMITMENT: PHYSICAL & SYSTEMS

Variable	Definition	Example
Physical Arrangements		
Building Quality	Extent to which building is clean, in good repair, and pleasant to be in.	HIGH Lot of effort recently put into fixing up building; looks good (& clean) inside & out; good facilities. LOW Lots of graffitti outside & some inside; cold, inadequate or broken bathrooms.
Material Adequacy	Extent to which teachers have materials and supplies they need to function.	LOW Teachers complain each one has only one complete set of texts so students cannot take books home to do homework. "How can social studies teacher use films and slides without windowshades?
Formal Systems		
Collegiality Structures	Arrangements or mechanisms that provide opportunities for discussion among teachers	HIGH Principal held off-campus retreat to bring staff together; department offices are being refurbished to be more useful. LOW Teachers' lounges have been taken for special ed classes. Staff committees are pro forma.
Structure for Teacher Input	Arrangements or mechanisms that allow for teacher influence on important school level decisions or those that effect their work.	HIGH Principal sets up committees to work out solutions to problems.

CHART 7

VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE TEACHER COMMITMENT: ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Variable	Definition	Example
Consistency	Degree to which rules, regulations and procedures are applied uniformly & with fairness, towards both students and toward staff.	LOW "Administrative staff are unfair; they play favorites, you never know what to expect." HIGH Discipline policies are reasonably and consistently enforced.
Administrative Support for Teachers	Administrators provide "back up" to teachers,; administrators offer resource support, understanding & appreciation; Communication is good.	LOW Teachers feel they received little support from adminis. on matters of discipline. HIGH Easy access to principal; Requests are attended to.
Instructional Press.	School leaders put emphasis on teaching & teaching well. There is a lot of talk about, demand for and assistance in curriculum and instruction.	LOW No evidence of in-service, no discussion of teaching instructional techniques.
Bureaucratic Orientation	Emphasis is on paperwork, documentation, maintenance of rules, meeting formal requirements.	HIGH Most attention is to public relations & "looking good". A good teacher is described (by principal) primarily as "a good manager."

CHART 8
VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE TEACHER COMMITMENT: TEACHER BELIEFS

Variable	Definition	Example
Teacher Belief		
Sense of Acceptance by Colleagues	Teachers feel liked & supported by other teachers; a sense of camaraderie & collegiality prevails.	HIGH "We go to bat for each other here; there's nothing we wouldn't do for each other."
Sense of Acceptance	Teachers feel valued & appreciated by administrators.	HIGH "If you do a good job, the principal is not lacking in praise." LOW "They have no idea what we have to go through."
Sense of Control	Degree to which staff feel they have influence or control over decisions that affect their work.	LOW "We never know what's going on; We'd like more say on scheduling; They take students out without us knowing about it."

Table 2

KENDALL'S TAU OF TEACHER COMMITMENT VARIABLES WITH PHYSICAL ARRANGMENT & FORMAL SYSTEMS

Physical Arrangments	Overall Commitment	Teaching	Commitment to Students	Place
Building Quality	.51	.29	.45	.62
Material Adequacy	.44	.52	.33	.40
Formal Systems				
Structure for Teacher Input	.87	.87	.74	.78
Collegiality Structures	.80	.86	.68	.70

Table 3

KENDALL'S TAU OF TEACHER COMMITMENT VARIABLES
WITH ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

Administrative Action Variables	Overall Commitment	Teaching	Commitment to Students	Place
Consistency	.63	.71	.58	.69
Adm. Support for Teachers	.69	.58	.50	.78
Instructional	.81	.75	.71	.84
Bureaucratic Orientation	-.63	-.43	-.60	-.64

Table 4

KENDALL'S TAU OF TEACHER COMMITMENT VARIABLES
WITH TEACHER BELIEFS

Teachers Beliefs	Overall Commitment	Commitment to Teaching	Commitment to Students	Commitment to Place
Acceptance by Administrators	.81	.80	.80	.71
Acceptance by Colleagues	.72	.66	.63	.74
Sense of Control	.74	.58	.55	.75

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH OVERALL TEACHER COMMITMENT
BY STRENGTH OF KENDALL'S TAU

- Structured opportunities for teacher input (FS)
- Sense of acceptance by administrators (TB)
- Instructional press (AA)
- Collegiality structures (FS)
- Teacher sense of control (TB)
- Sense of acceptance by colleagues (TB)
- Administrative support for teachers (AA)
- Administrative consistency (AA)
- (non)bureaucratic orientation (AA)
- Building quality (P)
- Material adequacy (P)

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH 3 TYPES OF TEACHER COMMITMENT
BY STRENGTH OF KENDALL'S TAU

Commitment to Teaching (top 4)

- Structure for teacher input (FS)
- Collegiality structures (FS)
- Acceptance by administrator (TB)
- Instructional press (AA)

Commitment to Place (top 4)

- Instructional press (AA)
- Adm. support for teachers (AA)
- Acceptance by colleagues (TB)
- Sense of control (TB)

Commitment to Kids (top 4)

- Acceptance by administrators (TB)
- Structures for teacher input (FS)
- Instructional of press (AA)
- Collegiality structure (FS)

CHART 9
EMERGING THEMES
SOURCES OF TEACHER COMMITMENT

Influence (Power)	Support	Acceptance
Opportunities for Input	Administrative Support	Acceptance by Administrators
	Collegiality Structures	
Sense of Control	Administrative Consistency	Acceptance by colleagues
	Instructional Press	
	Bureaucratic press	
	Material adequacy	
	Building quality	

EMERGING THEMES

- The positive effects of school tradition, & history;
- The pervasive importance of leadership;
- The availability of choice:

EXTERNALIZING THE PROBLEM	VS.	CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

EMERGING THEMES

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVENESS:

EXTERNALIZING THE PROBLEM

- Not accepting responsibility for effective schooling: ("blaming the system"/"blaming the students").

BUREAUCRATIC SOLUTIONS

- Not addressing the problems directly: problem areas are known but solutions skirt the problem (e.g. attendance).

MISSING OPPORTUNITIES

- Insufficient teacher-involved & relevant staff development or active school improvement activity.

POOR COMMUNICATION

- Not utilizing available staff to maximize instructional support or to meet student needs.

- Poor communication between levels (adm., teacher, students) and lack of understanding of the problems/demands of the other.

- Poor communication between district and school levels.

- Seniority, pesions, inertia keep, staff in place, even if uncommited.